Power Politics in *Yayati & Jokumaraswami*

**Introduction**

Girish Karnad has been widely acclaimed by both the theatre and drama critics for certain aspects of his plays: plot construction, characterization, song, symbolism, use of myth and folktales, reinterpretation of history, and projection of contemporary social and psychological problems. As rightly said by Julie Sanders, “Myth is continuously evoked, altered, and reworked, across cultures, and across generations (64) and Karnad’s play *Yayati* is a rich depiction of these aspects in its rawest form.

*Yayati* was the first play written by Karnad in 1961 while he was still at Oxford and received critical acclaim. Centered on the story of a mythological king, the play established Karnad’s use of the themes of history and mythology that would continue to be a significant characteristic of his work over the following decades.

In *Yayati*, Karnad has taken the traditional Puranic theme from the *Mahabharata* and given a fresh interpretation to it. *Yayati* is the story of a king named Yayati who was a man of amorous disposition, his infidelity to his wife Devayani brought upon him the curse of old age and infirmity from her father, Sukracharya. Though the play retells the age-old story of the mythical king from the *Mahabharat*, Karnad has given the traditional tale a new meaning making it highly relevant to today’s life. The problem discussed in the play is based on the modern issues of existentialism and tries to explore the present by way of the past. The symbolic theme of Yayati’s attachment to life and its pleasures and also his final renunciation are retained.
The play is rich and infused with the theme of duties and responsibilities of father upon son and vice-versa. Even though the play is motivated by each protagonists own concept of the opposite sex, it does try to allow the characters with enough space to seek their own identity.

Karnad interprets the ancient theme in modern context. Like Yayati, the common man of today is grouped in the darkness of material and sensual pleasures. He finds himself in a world in which old spiritual values have been entirely swept away and the new spiritual values are yet to be discovered. Karnad’s interpretation of the old myth on the exchange of ages between father and son puzzled and angered conventional critics, but the enlightened readers and critics appreciated it for its modernity.

The story of *Jokumaraswami* by Chandrashekhar Kambara deals with two strong themes, one is the social evil of slavery where the perennial clash between the landlord and tiller is defined in two underlying terms one is the obvious – who is the true owner of the land the landlord or the tiller and the other is more philosophical in nature – who is the true father of the child the husband or the biological father. The story has been constructed on a very rustic and basic storyline which holds the audience spell bound through its rawness and the portrayal of life at its most basic.

*Jokumaraswami* is a phallic god of fertility worshipped in Karnataka. In the play of the same name Kambara has personified the deity through Basanna, the fearless peasant protagonist who stands up to the tyrannical feudal lord with tragic consequences, reliving the myth of the god in the person of the hero. In this secularized reworking of a religious myth, Chandrasekhar Kambara’s vibrant, earthy play creatively uses the local folk theatre form of bayalaata blending worship, music,
dance, song, narration, sex, death and religion to convey a powerfully contemporary anti-feudal message.

**Yayati: Plot in Brief**

The play opens with the Sutradhara who informs the audience that it is a mythical play—a page from the history of the unknown past. The characters, the incidents and circumstances are related to the old times. However the reality depicted in the play is applicable to modern times as well. The Sutradhara also shares that neither a scholar nor an ordinary person can escape the burden of responsibility wherein lies the joy of life. Whether it is an old man in search of lost youth or a saint lost in the darkness or the mute. The Sutradhara has tried to bring forth the theme of responsibility.

The play starts on an abrupt note, with Swarnalata complaining to Devayani against Sharmishtha. Though Devayani defends Sharmishtha, the latter does not accord proper respect to Devayani. In fact she is hostile and challenges Devayani’s marriage to Yayati as she knows too well that Yayati married Devayani because she was the daughter of Sukracharya who could bless him with immortality. Despite the on-going conflict between Devayani and Sharmishtha, Devayani does not order the latter to go away from the palace.

Devayani later confronts Yayati on his reasons to marry her. Yayati is frustrated with this challenge after two years of married life and knows that Sharmishtha is the one who is poisoning Devayani’s mind. He decides to give an ultimatum to Sharmishtha. When Yayati confronts Sharmishtha and asks her to correct her behavior within a month or leave the palace, she challenges him and
shares the reason for the strained relationship between herself and Devayani. Sharmishtha then seduces Yayati and when Devayani finds out, she is livid. Yayati cannot understand the source of her anger and says that he will marry Sharmishtha and make her his second queen. Devayani is furious and she leaves the palace and goes to her father Sukracharya. When her father finds out about Yayati’s behavior he curses Yayati of premature old age.

When Yayati comes to know about this he is shocked and does not accept the responsibility of what he has done and blames Sharmishtha. The curse shatters Yayati. He does not want to lose his youth and vitality and does not know how to handle the situation. Sharmishtha tries to pacify Yayati by asking him to accept the curse and retire to the forest but he gets violent and refuses to accept old age.

When Pooru, Yayati’s son informs that his curse can be redeemed if some young person accepts his old age, Yayati is jubilant. But Pooru cautions Yayati that nobody would be ready to accept the curse, and the latter does not believe that anybody would refuse the king. But when this is proved as a fact and nobody comes forward to accept the curse in Yayati stead, he breaks down. Pooru cannot see the suffering of his father and tells Yayati that he will accept Yayati’s curse and go to the forest. When Pooru proposes that the curse given to Yayati should be transferred to him, Sharmishtha tries to dissuade him. She reminds him of his responsibility towards his new wife. But Pooru doesn’t desist from his decision. Yayati succeeds in transferring his old age to Pooru.

When Swarnalata gives Chitralekha the news that Pooru has accepted his father's old age, she is stunned but decides to valiantly accept the situation. Pooru wants her support for the responsibility he has taken and Chitralekha gladly extends
her support. But when she sees Pooru as an aged infirm person, Chitralekha realizes what has truly befallen her. She gets frightened. She curses herself for not being as large hearted as her husband is. She begs Pooru to reconsider his decision but in vain. She then goes to Yayati and questions the moral authority of Yayati in taking over her husband’s youth on the very first night of their marriage. But Yayati instead orders her to accept her lot and to take back Pooru, he reminds her of her duty and commands her to obey him. Chitralekha seeing the futility of her situation, commits suicide. Her suicide is the turning point for Yayati who realizes his selfishness and the cruel decision that he had forced on his son. He regrets his actions and begs Pooru to take back his youth and rule in his stead. In the end Yayati and Sharmishtha leave for the forest and Pooru goes on to rule successfully forming a dynasty of his own.

**Jokumaraswami: Plot in Brief**

The play is knitted beautifully with few words and more lyrics where the Sutradhara plays the key role in introducing Lord Jokumaraswami to the audience. He praises Lord Jokumaraswami as the remover of barrenness in women and also the one who enables one to gain her husbands’ love and affection.

The play begins with the introduction of the Gowda as an evil person who is painted as a dark character with all negative qualities; who cheats and exploits his subjects by confiscating their land through illegal means. He is ironically called a Dum Dum god as he carries a gun and acts like he is the lord of the town. Gowda enters from the audience followed by Basanna. His father has died under mysterious circumstances and Basanna suspects Gowda’s hand. Gowda wants Basanna’s land and claims it belongs to him now. Basanna challenges him and dares him to exercise this illegal act on his land.
After Basanna leaves, Gurya comes in, who has lost two sheep to the servants of Gowda and lodges a complaint with Gowda. But Gowda instead lashes out at Gurya and a cowed Gurya backs down. In the meantime Gowdathi enters, she wants to talk to her husband and request him to come to her in the evening as it is a full moon night and an auspicious one for the conception of a child. Gowdathi longs for a child and is sad because she has not yet borne fruit. She listens to the servant gossips and finds out that on worshiping and then eating Jokumaraswami a barren woman can also bear children, so she determines to go to Shari (the village whore) and get Jokumaraswami for herself. She does succeed in her quest though Shari points out to her that her husband Gowda is impotent and this fact is known to all and getting a child from him would be a challenge. Still Shari blesses Gowdathi and gifts her with Jokumaraswami.

In the meanwhile, Basanna and Gowda have another dispute on the land and it is wagered that whoever manages to survive spending one night in the disputed land will become the undisputed owner. Basanna plans to go and spend the night on his land, but Gowda tells his henchmen to go to the land and kill Basanna while he himself would be at Shari’s place.

Gowda also meanwhile had promised Gowdathi to partake of Jokumaraswami in the quest for a child. When Gowdathi hears that he has gone to spend the night in the disputed land, she packs the curry of Jokumaraswami and takes it to him. In the hut at the land, Basanna scares off the henchmen of Gowda who come to kill him and is settling for the night when Gowdathi come in and feeds him the curry thinking he was Gowda.
Basanna then seduces Gowdathi into an illicit relationship though she does protest about her chastity and marital status. Gowdathi becomes with child and when Gowda finds out that Basanna is responsible for this, he collects the village people to come and kill Basanna. Gowdathi runs to Basanna and warns him of this threat but he takes it lightly in the beginning. On realizing the seriousness of the issue he insists Gowdathi to run away from there and keep the child safe as it is a part of him. Gowdathi does so. Gowda and the villagers than surround Basanna and kill him. The play ends with the Sutradhar hoping for a good and just government, plenty of children and the sower of the land being the owner of the land.

**Element of Myth & Folk**

Girish Karnad’s technique of bringing together myths, legends and folk narratives has led to meaningful and familiar plays with a different rendition. In his plays he uses myth as a means of exploring a modern outcome of a traditional situation. Karnad picks up threads of legends and folk tales that he can mold into his plays and does not employ myths in their entirety. He uses his imagination to add, modify and enrich the plots to these tales. And this has been beautifully done in *Yayati*, one of his first plays. As shared by Dharwadker, the play establishes that “…myth is not merely a narrative to be bent to present purposes, but a structure of meaning worth exploring in itself, because it offers opportunities for philosophical reflection without the connotations of realism or the necessity of a contemporary setting” (xvii).

Karnad in *Yayati* makes his characters shape-shift when Pooru sacrifices his youth for King Yayati. Though in reality it is impossible for such exchanges to occur, Karnad makes use of non-realistic fantasies, fables, myths and folklore to entertain
and enthrall the audience. “The ancient Indian myths can be harnessed to address the modern sensibility of loss of individuality” (Boratti, 62). Through this exploitation of myths and legends, Karnad has tried to relate to the modern man's dilemma on significant issues like problems of identity, patriarchy, man-woman relationship and pervasive sense of alienation. Karnad uses, “…myths and folk form in his plays to exorcise socio-cultural evils” (Babu, 235). For e.g. Pooru in his introduction into the play expresses his identity crisis and sense of alienation – “The great mystery then surely is how this glorious bloodline produced a specimen like me” (Karnad 35).

“Yayati reveals the existentialist view that each man is what he chooses to be or makes himself” (Dodiya, 43). His interpretation of the “familiar old myth on the exchange of ages between father and son baffled and angered my conventional critics, but for other, who were trying to root their contemporary concerns in old myth…Puru was a great experience” (Murthy, 7).

A societal folk tradition challenged by Karnad is of patriarchal dominance where all the women in the play right from Devayani to Chitralekha faced patriarchal pressures in their relationships, irrespective of their caste and position in society.

Another element of the use of myth of Yayati is the perennial clash between the expectations of parents and the aspirations of younger generation. Karnad strongly relates to this dilemma as he himself has been a victim of the same in his younger years. When Karnad was awarded a prestigious scholarship for studying abroad, his parents were reluctant to permit him to go as they felt that he might settle down there and forget his roots, a fear that most parents have. For Karnad this was distressing and preyed on his mind, which later when he became a writer might have influenced him to deal with this theme in *Yayati*. 
In *Yayati*, the selfish tendency of the King is revealed when he willingly exchanges his old age with the youth of his young son for the satisfaction of his youthful urges. The myth becomes so relevant to the puzzled sensibility of the dramatist that it reflects his own anxieties about his future, his own resentment with all those who seemed to sacrifice his future. The anxieties are not the anxieties of Karnad alone but a perplexing issue to all the people of his generation as the gradual increase in generation gap has heightened its intensity.

By a clever manipulation of the old myths and folktales, Karnad is able to serve a slice of reality mixed with fantasy. “Karnad knows that by linking the present to the past, a kind of continuity can be ascertained and human predicament, in the light of the present, in the lap of the past, can be established” (Trivedi, 160). It helps him not only to reflect the fret and fever of the contemporary world, but also enables him to prepare his readers and audience to face the problems without simply existing quite complacently.

In *Jokumaraswami*, Kambara begins his play with the age old myth of the snake god, with a snake gourd symbolizing the snake as a fertility symbol removing barrenness in females - “At the center of the stage, there is a basket filled with vegetables. In the middle of this basket, a snake-gourd stands prominently” (Kambara, 82)

Kambara again emphasis on the folk belief that barrenness in women could be removed through the myth that worshipping Jokumaraswami and then consuming him will remove barrenness of a woman irrespective of her status or age, be it a young girl, widow or hag all are welcomed by Jokumaraswami. The words of the Sutradhara describe this aspect of Jokumarswami beautifully – “On this auspicious occasion if
barren women offer worship to this god, and afterwards make a curry out of him to feed their husbands, dozens of children will be born in a jiffy” (*Ibid*, 83).

Another myth with which the play begins is that the Sutradhara emphasis that instead of starting the play by worshipping Lord Ganesha, the play will start by worshipping Lord Jokumaraswami who is the younger brother of Lord Ganesha.

Sutradhara: Jokumaraswami must be worshipped before the commencement of our play.

…

Himmela: Instead of worshipping Ganesha at the commencement of the play, you want to worship this kind of God?

Sutradhara: …This Jokumaraswami is the younger brother of Ganesha and indeed today’s play is about him (*Ibid*, 82).

Kambara also makes use of myth to help explain a problem or perpetuate a mystery. In *Jokumaraswami* there is significant importance attached to a bird especially a parrot and this element is introduced strategically at various points in the play. What is this bird, is it Jokumaraswami, is the parrot which is owned by Basanna a metaphor for Jokumaraswami.

In the beginning when the sutradhar describes the annihilation of Jokumaraswami and in the end the poetry describing the murder of Bassnana both bear close similarity and perpetuates another myth that even in death there is life.

“Where the blood falls,
Springs the sprout and the shoot,
And all the earth is fresh, is green” (*Ibid*, 88 & 137).
The mythical personification of Jokumaraswami as a virile young man is also sung in folk style by three women – Bassi-Shari-Nungi is also very interesting and shared here.

A pretty green shirt
A dhoti of silk
His turban at a jaunty slant-
Friend, let us worship Jokumaraswami,
Handsome Jokumaraswami!
What laughter under the moustache,
What brightness in the cheeks
The naughty one with his brows
Ogles at the waists of flighty girls.
Isn’t he Jokumaraswami?
At a hand clap he turns and glares,
Not we, but the barren ones have called you.
They await you, hands on brows –
Go kindly to them.
In their bosoms they’ll hide you,
In flowers will they cover you.
Grant them fruits, great Lord-
That all-high God Jokumaraswami
Do we worship (Ibid, 119)

Here it is seen how the mythical god Jokumaraswami is personified as a man who is awaited by all women to come to them and impregnate them.
Another myth in Jokumaraswami is about the Devil’s field which is the land under contention between Gowda and Basanna. It is believed that anybody who spends the night in the devil’s field and survives becomes the owner of the field. Gowda uses this myth to try to kill Basanna just as he had his father – “Tonight is Jokumaraswami’s full moon night. Whoever can sleep through tonight in the field takes the field. Are you ready?” (Ibid, 118). With these lines Gowda challenges Basanna to sleep in the devil’s field.

A very strong folk element of Mela or chorus is followed in Jokumaraswami with important scenes or episodes being sung by a chorus, this add to the charm of the play and makes it very enthralling to the audience.

Thus, the element of myth and folk in both the plays is very important and shapes and carries forward the plot to its completion. It also makes the play more alive and enthralling to the audience. Both the playwrights are strongly influenced by myth and folk of Indian culture and in the plays Yayati and Jokumaraswami this rich cultural heritage has been shaped into a modern and contemporary theme.

Theme of the plays

Karnad, through the portrayal of the character of Yayati, focuses on various important themes such as Yayati’s attachment to life and its pleasures, marital discord and compromise, and the Yayati complex. He has also looked into the master-slave relationship with different twist leading to the complexity of relationships within the play.

Yayati, is a King of Hastinapur and given to indulging into all his senses. He is attached to life and all its sensual pleasures. When he gets a chance to marry
Devayani, the daughter of Sukracharya, he grasps it to fulfil his lust for immortality. This is described by Sharmishtha in her dialogue with Devayani:

Sharmishtha: Except that he is not lusting for you. You poor darling, he lusts for immortality. Your father's art of sanjeevani.

….He is not short of women is he, women of his own kind….you only you could lead him to the ultimate goal: a sanctuary beyond the reach of death. Aah! The joy of turning the funeral pyres into altars for one’s own fire sacrifice. The timeless thrill of it (Karnad, 11).

Through the character of Yayati, Karnad has mocked at the marital relationship, where the rules for men and women are different. For instance when Yayati wants to continue his relationship with Sharmishtha, he does not understand why Devayani would take offence to it.

Yayati:…I am not out to make her (Sharmishtha) my concubine, she will be my queen.”

Devayani (horrified): Your Queen? Your royal consort?

Yayati: Yes, you don’t need to worry, devi. Your position will not be touched. You will remain the Senior Queen. You will share my throne…

…. Devayani: Let go of her, sir. Does my being here mean nothing to you?

Yayati:…Devi, what are you upset about. She will be lodged in a separate residence. I shall ensure that she does not imping on your life for one fleeting moment (Ibid, 29)
Here it is realized how Karnad has portrayed Yayati as a selfish and patriarchal male who finds nothing wrong in multi marriages and discounts Devayani’s anger and anxiety.

Opposite to this Karnad has introduced Swarnlata a maid in the palace whose story is described in her own words to Chitralekha. She describes the torment that her husband went through on his suspicion of an illicit relationship with her teacher in the past. To escape the pain of this unbearable torment of her husband, Swarnlatha falsely admits to her husband that she had a relationship with her teacher. This results to an end of her marriage with the disappearance of her husband.

Here Karnad has shown the unfair and different rules set for male and female where the male – Yayati has the freedom to forge another relationship with Sharmishtha in the presence of Devayani and forces Devayani and Sharmishtha to accept this polygamous relationship. In direct contrast when Swarnalatha admits falsely to a pre marriage relationship to her husband, he deserts her without any intimation.

Another strong social point raised by Karnad is how society makes marriages based on ancestral lineage where the individual is of no importance. For e.g. Chitralekha’s marriage to Pooru is a mockery of the emotional expectations of the individual sacrificed for the higher status in life, where Chitralekha marries Pooru for becoming the Queen of Bharatha dynasty inspite of Pooru’s limitations as a husband.

Pooru: You know Chitalekha’s father had invited princes from all over the country and organised an archery contest for them (Pause) the contest had to be cancelled at the last moment.
…..But it had been decided long in advance that she should marry the Bharata prince that she was destined to become the Empress of Aryavarta.

…..But the family had made up its mind. Actually they didn’t need me. They needed some male figure from this palace. A door-keeper’s statue would have done just as well (Ibid, 36-37).

This describes the pretence of the societal marriages made in today’s world where the dynasty is more important than the individual in something so personalized as a marriage.

Karnad also looks at the lack of commitment or passion in the marriages made for expeditious reasons, where he describes Pooru’s unwillingness to share the marital bedroom with his wife – “What I wanted to know was, can Chitralekha use that other room while I use this one – for just one evening?” (Ibid, 39).

According to Radhai, “In Yayati, almost all characters are irresponsible. The protagonist, Yayati, is an irresponsible King and father; Puru, though a considerate son, shirks his responsibility as a husband. Chitralekha, though irresponsibly chooses to commit suicide by consuming poison, doesn’t want to die at the last minute (180).

Through the life of Yayati, Karnad brings out the fact that selfish paternal authority and blind filial loyalty could bring ruin to a family when it is misappropriated. Karnad projects Yayati as a selfish father demanding his son’s youth in exchange for his curse and this selfishness of Yayati becomes conspicuous.

Through the character of Pooru, Karnad has defined a “Yayati Complex”, which indicates the moral obligations in Indian family of the son towards his parents. Karnad has employed the myth of shape-shifting to show the intricacies of Indian
family structure and challenge its moral authority which makes sons like Pooru to sacrifice their prime and precious things to keep it intact. He writes, “While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati during the three weeks it took the ship to reach England and in the lonely cloisters of the university - the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues; the myth had nailed me to the past (Ganesh, 2007).

The play shows that mere old age (i.e. Yayati) should not be revered but the maturity of youth (i.e. Pooru). The adaptation of the myth of Yayati by Karnad has its relevance not only at the time it was written but also to the present time when children have to sacrifice their wishes to the whims of their parents who are competing with other parents. However, some children are also forcing their loved ones to bend to their wishes. So it is very clear that adaptations provide us with new perspectives and points of view.

Karnad has also looked very challengingly at the changing relationship of Devayani and Sharmishtha. The interpersonal relationship in between Devayani and Sharmishtha is based on master-slave relationship. Whereas in the beginning they were good friends even though they were from different class, Devayani belonging to the higher caste Brahmin, daughter of Sukracharya and Sharmishtha an Asura Princess of lower birth. Devayani though friends with Sharmishtha never forgot her higher lineage, which led to a permanent dispute between the two friends. This
escalated to Sharmishtha’s father giving his daughter to Devayani as a slave on her demand, when she married Yayati. Sharmishtha is very bitter about her slavery. She knows that she is beautiful and educated. But her slavery has turned her into an animal. She is aware that being a Rakshasa woman, she can’t spew out nectar. She is always looking for a chance to avenge her insult. As a result of this she seduces Yayati – “Yes, I got him into bed with me. This was my revenge on you. After all. A slave what weapon did I have but my body?” (Karnad, 29).

The struggle between Devayani and Sharmishtha is also for power. Devayani does not want that Sharmishtha should enter and encroach on her relationship with Yayati. Devayani tells Sharmishtha, “I will not be able to sleep a wink while his hands caress your body” (Ibid. 33). Devayani is angry with Sharmishtha because she is worried about her influence on Yayati as Yayati is a symbol of power.

Thus through this master-slave discord, Karnad shows how this relationship has shaped the plot and resulted to the final disaster in the play. It is because of Sharmishtha’s revengeful feelings that she seduces Yayati which results into the curse of Sukracharya upon Yayati bringing him to an untimely old age. This in turn puts Pooru into the web of sacrificing his youth and marriage and finally leading to the disastrous suicide of Chitralekha.

Kambara in Jokumaraswami has focussed more on the myth of Jokumaraswami, marital indifference and the lust for power by describing the age old traditional relationship of the landlord and tiller through a master-slave relationship between Gowda and Basanna.

Like in Yayati, marital relationship plays a very important role in Jokumaraswami also, but in a different way. The marital relationship between Gowda
and Gowdathi is viewed in the light of man-woman rather than husband-wife interdependence. The relationship is a mere formality, with Gowda spending his time with concubines every night and Gowdathi bearing the drudgery of day-to-day living. The care and concern which we find in Yayati towards Devayani is lacking, with an absolute indifference from the side of Gowda towards Gowdathi. Gowdathi also is shown as a neglected wife who feels thwarted owing to her barrenness and is desperate to have a child through the blessings of Jokumaraswami.

  Gowdathi: How can you understand a woman’s need.
  Gowda: Come on. Then, make me understand. Here, I’ll light another bidi.
  Tell me.
  Gowdathi: As if you really care for what I say. There was an old man hiding behind that small moon taking aim at the parrot…
  Gowda: You are still dreaming. Wake up.
  Gowdathi: We’ve been married for ten years. Have I ever asked you a favour?
  Gowda: What do you lack? First tell me that.
  Gowdathi: I have everything! Food to eat, clothes to wear. Do you know what!
  Gurupada’s daughter said?
  Gowda: What?
  Gowdathi: ‘You have a field as big as the forest, a house as big as the village, but there is no child in the house.
  Gowda: Did she say that? Must do something about that (Kambar, 101).

  Here it is seen that both husband and wife are not on the same page. While Gowdathi is talking about the lack of children after ten years of marriage and the fact that the villagers are commenting on the same, Gowda takes it as a challenge to his
power and thinks more on the lines of punishing them. Gowda does not care at all for the happiness or desire of Gowdathi, he spends most of his time with concubines’ in spite of being impotent just to show his power and masculinity.

In the play it is seen how the indifference and lack of communication and concern of Gowda towards his wife leads to his wife being seduced by Basanna – “Ok, So I will come home for dinner this evening” (Ibid, 102). In spite of this promise which was very important as Gowdathi would prepare a special curry to feed to Gowda and remove her barrenness, Gowda changes his plans and does not bother to inform his wife of his changed plans.

Gowda: (Calls one of the servants) You, go to my house. Get food and a blanket.. If they ask, tell them at home that Gowda will sleep in the devil’s field tonight. All of you go th that field and finish the job. You can eat the food meant for me. Come and tell me later what happened. I’ll be at Shari’s house, understand? (Ibid, 118).

When Gowdathi receives this news she obviously does not handover the special curry and instead takes it personally to the devil’s field. In her confusion she feeds this curry to Basanna who is in the devil’s field resulting to Basanna seducing her.

Here Kambara has given a situation where due to the negligence of the husband, the wife is seduced by another man and begets a child. He indirectly links this to the age old traditional battle between the landlord and tiller: Who is the owner of the land? The tiller who converts a fallow land to fertile one or the moneylender who exploits the tiller and takes ownership of the land illegally. In Jokumaraswami, Basanna and his father worked hard on a barren patch of land called Devil’s field and
converted it to a fertile land, Gowda now wants this land for himself and also killed Basanna’s father for this land and is trying to snatch the land from Basanna by illegal means.

Basanna: …With aching arms, and starving bellies, my father and I cleared the forest. When men feared to pass that way even during the day, frightened of the devil’s field, my father and I labored there day and night! And now this fellow comes along and claims the field as his!

Gowda: Gowdashiip is ours for generations. Your father has written off this field to us and has pressed his thumb at the bottom you have come along now to change it all? Let laws and rules be made! In the end, the moneyed man is always the big man. I only have to throw six, if not three, coins and your laws and rules fall into my pocket (Ibid, 115).

Just as in Yayati Sharmishtha revengefully seduces Yayati, in Jokusmaraswami also the tiller Basanna seduces Gowdavati. The Gowda and Gowdathi in ten years of marriage have failed to conceive a child. Gowda indifferent to his wife and the fact that it is well known across the village that he is impotent has led to the situation where Gowdathi forms physical relations with Basanna and conceives a child. Basanna who is the slave seduces Gowdathi. This is described in the conversation between Basanna and Gowdathi:

Basanna: Ohohoho! Are you talking about your brave husband? Are you talking about your valiant husband? Who is your husband? The one who lays every girl in the village and runs away just to show that he too is a man, is he your husband? On the day when a whores’ seal has to be broken he snores under a blanket, is
he your brave man? His wife has been panting for a talking parrot
for ten years and he couldn’t get it? Is he your husband? (Ibid, 126)

Through these words Basanna convinces Gowdathi about Gowda’s impotency
and also persuades her into an intimate physical relationship which later on results to
Gowdathi’s pregnancy.

Basanna: There is no right or wrong after eating
Jokumaraswami curry
Don’t tell me.
Don’t show me the bundle of scriptures
I’ve read many books and
All of them say
That a man and woman should unite (Ibid, 127).
Kambara also has played on comparing the barren land with a barren woman
who is made fertile by Basanna.

Gowdathi: How else can I tell Gowda that I am a woman? A bird
comes flying from afar and sits in its cage! It sings so that the earth
itself becomes all ears and then a face and arms and legs
appear…..Once more the same barren earth, the same gaunt,
leafless trees, the same empty birds’ nests….. (Ibid, 121).

Godwathi is shown as a helpless, neglected woman who has to bear the scorn
of being barren for no fault of her, even though the whole village knows the truth
about Gowda.
As discussed above, in both the plays the master-slave relationship is filled with strife and both Shramishta and Basanna do not accept the domination of their masters be it Devayani or Gowda. Also Sharmishta seduces Yayati to avenge her insult, whereas Basanna impregnates Gowdathi and stresses the underlying statement that the tiller is the owner of the land and can convert even a barren land into a fertile one, which money and power cannot do.

It can also be seen that in both plays though superficially the master looks powerful and dominating yet by the end the slave is the one who wins the situation making the master helpless.

**Techniques of the play**

In *Yayati* Karnad takes the story from one genre i.e. mythic story as it appeared in *Mahabharata* and delivers it to new audiences by means of the aesthetic conventions of an entirely different generic process, a stage play. Yayati’s story which happened over many years is shown to be happening in a very limited span of time in Karnad’s *Yayati*. He has to cut or shorten many action units to focus on the core part of the myth i.e. transplantation of age. Most of the events are merely narrated and conveyed or suggested by characters – like the marriage of Devayani and Yayati, the reason behind the bitter and acrimonious relationship of Devayani and Sharmishta, Sharmishta’s throwing Devayani in the well, the curse of Shukracharya, and Swarnalata’s marital story. All these are narrated in the play, they are not shown on the stage. But these actions are very significant because these are the causes of the further actions. Karnad has applied the innovative narration to save time and to create maximum impact through narration rather than depiction.
Karnad’s *Yayati* is written in the Yakshagana form and Karnad uses glorified and celestial language for the Sutradhara. For Swarnalata and Sharmishtha, Karnad uses colloquial language. Except Chitralekha all three women characters use abusive language. But Sharmishtha’s language is more sharpened and cutting than that of Devayani and Swarnalata. And is expressed in this conversation in Act One between Swarnalatha and Devayani where we are given an inkling of the bitter personality of Sharmishtha.

Swarnalatha: That spiteful whore-I would have torn her hair out if you hadn’t stopped me, taught that fiend a proper lesson. The rakshasi. You heard us, madam. Did I say a word against her? All those dirty insinuations. The nasty jibes. They are too horrible to think. She didn’t even spare his Majesty. I…I can’t bear it.

Devyanai: She has a foul tongue. I know. Just ignore her (Karnad, 7).

Another notable point in the play is that from the start there are always two characters in conversation, and when one leaves than another joins. Also the two characters are talking about the next character when he or she enters. For e.g. in the above excerpt, there is dialogue between Swarnalatha and Devayani and they are talking about Sharmishtha. And when Swarnalatha exits, then Sharmishtha enters. They both converse about Yayati with Sharmishtha raising doubts about Yayati’s devotion to Devayani. During their altercation, Yayati enters and Sharmishtha exits the stage. This series is seen across the play at most of the points, which is an interesting and novel way of writing in sequences, used by Karnad.

In *Yayati*, Karnad has used the beating of the drums in a significant manner. Beating of the drums indicates the arrival of Pooru with his bride. The first beating of
drums takes place in act two. This drum beating is mark of happiness of the people due to the arrival of Prince with his bride Chitralekha. In the act four once again there is beating of drums which indicates the arrival of Prince Pooru. But this Pooru is changed as he has accepted the old age of his father. The beating of the drums in *Yayati* adds dramatic effect to the play and signify important happenings to follow.

A theatre is a place where the spectators are transformed into a magic world, and so there is an extensive use of songs, dance and mask in his plays for spectacular effect. Both *Yayati* and *Jokumaraswami* make use of these elements to add to the richness of the play and they are not forms of embellishment but they are the play.

*Jokumaraswami* in fact initiated a new, creative phase in Kannada theatre. This was a play for “Total Theatre”. It had not only great songs set to music by B.V. Karanath, it had ritual worship of the phallic fertility god, humor, uninhibited treatment of sexuality, conflict and tragedy everything to give the audience the whole theatrical effect. Almost every act’s beginning in *Jokumaraswami* is with a Mela or a musical and song element which introduces the next series of happenings to follow in the play.

A notable point in the play is the title given for segments in the play, instead of mentioning Act One or Act Two, Kambara has given very interesting and mysterious titles like “Rise and Come, Beloved Parrot” (Kambara, 103), “The Paunch Fell Down” (*Ibid*, 112).

As in *Yayati*, the characters are in couples on the stage, the same technique is by and large found in *Jokumaraswami*, with characters talking mostly in pairs. This gives a smoothness to the play and is easier for the audience to follow.
Also another notable point in Jokumaraswami is that the killing of Basanna by the Gowda’s henchmen is described in metaphors as the sacrifice of the young fertility god which will rejuvenate the land and usher in a new society the strength of the play lies in the blending of the celebratory and ironical modes (Ibid, xiii).

Prologue: The Significance of the Beginning of the Play and Role of the Sutradhara

The role of the Sutradhara in both the plays begins with the Prologue. The purpose and theme of the play are revealed through the character of the Sutradhara. In Yayati the prologue has the Sutradhara entering the stage and addressing the audience. The Sutradhara explains the difference between myth and mythology by sharing with the audience that the play which is to be performed deals with an ancient myth but it is not a mythological play because a mythological play aims to plunge us in to the sentiment of devotion. He also shares that mythology aims to convince us that suffering meted out to test our faith. He defines death as having no part in mythology as death empties life of meaning – “There are no deaths in mythology, for no matter how hard you try, death cannot give meaning to anything that has gone before. It merely empties life of meaning” (Karnad, 5-6). From this he goes on to say that the plot of the play is to more around Sanjeevani Vidya but no gods are there in the play – “Our play has no gods. And it deals with death. The key element in its plot is the Sanjeevani vidya – the art of reviving the dead” (Ibid, 6). The Sutradhara explains the background of the play to update the audience about what to expect. He gives an idea of the expectation from the bride and groom (Chitralekha and Pooru) who are expected of forging the next dynasty. But he also warns that the path to noble intentions are riddled with uncertainties and choices and these are the ones which
shape and change destiny – “What we have in front of us is not a well-chartered map but a network of paths, many of which plunge into the shrubbery and disappear before we have even registered them” (*Ibid*, 6).

At the end of the fourth act once again Sutradhara enters on the stage and tells the audience that just like Sanskrit drama the play must have happy ending and he tells –“Pooru ruled long and wisely and was hailed as a philosopher king” (*Ibid*, 70).

In *Jokumaraswami*, the Sutradhara’s role is very lively and adds to the element of humor and rustic charm. In *Yayati* the role of the Sutradhara is more serious and as shown in play beginning and story introduction, the tone is more serious and somber.

In the prologue to the play *Jokumaraswami*, the Sutradhara deconstructs the fertility and vegetation myth built around the figure of Jokumaraswami and from then onwards the play works out an elaborate double-entendre in which an earthy attitude to sexuality is mixed with more serious view of the tiller being the owner of the land. The descriptive introduction of the god Jokumaraswami in the prologue itself shares this view.

Sutradhara: …This our great god, the god of green, of rains, of harvest, of abuses, Jokumaraswami.

Himmela – Oho!

Sutradhara: Within two days of his birth, all the girls in the town…

Himmela: Aha!

Strudhara: He laid.

Himmela: You went wrong there

Sutradhara: Why?
Himmela: What a rare creature this god of yours is! Only men who’re idle chase and lay women. And your god acts like them. He laid girls, he laid hags, shouldn’t you atleast be more prudent in your language (Kambara 86).

Here it’s seen how the Sutradhara in the Prologue itself introduces the phallic god in very clear, crude and obscene terms. Also the back and forth dialogue of Sutradhara and Himmela where they both contradict each other are like the Rangla-Rangli of the Gujarati folk who entertain the audience as well as introduce them. The introduction of each character in the play is also not only different but derogatory as shown in the following description of Gowda – “Our God Dum Dum has a big belly. He digests anything. Fellows like you get the gripes after eating two or three rotis. Our god can digest human flesh, and he just loves chicks.” (Ibid, 91). Also the introduction to Basanna is dual with the chorus saying – “No, He’s the lamb meant for our Dum Dum god”, “No. He is the milch cow of our God” (Ibid 92). The most basic and crude description is of Gowdathi – “That’s the field of Dum Dum God” (Ibid, 92).

The role of Sutradhara in both the plays is quite similar – in the sense that they both enter in the prologue, introduce to the audience not only the play and its set-up, but also the plot, storyline, characters and the background of the play. Thus they both play a key role in acquainting the audience with the play. Thereafter both enter right in the end of the play to provide closure and share the thought for the future. In both the plays the role of the Sutradhara in the end is to change the mood of the play from sad and dejected to a note of hope and regeneration.
Portrayal of women

In most of Karnad’s plays one can see that the choice and consequences of that choice were dissociated and the one who suffered the most due to the choices of others was always a woman. Yayati strongly emphasizes this fact for most of the female characters in the play be it Sharmishtha, Swarnlata or Chitralekha all of them suffered due to the choices made by the man. Through these situations Karnad has tried to highlight the issue of gender especially in the way Yayati treats women in the play. C.N. Ramachandran feels that in most plays of Karnad, “the worst sufferers are women . . . who are caught up in a whirlpool of Hindu patriarchy, and are sucked down helplessly” (28).

Kambara on the other hand in most of the plays does not look into the dynamics of husband-wife relationship but stresses more on male-female relationship irrespective of their marital standing. Kambara has always shown women as strong and independent women who think and act independently and take responsibility for their action. In Jokumara swami also Gowdathí though shown as a wife whose husband’s indifference is legendary, runs her household and manages the servant and rules her own universe. She also takes it on herself to change her barren state and agrees to a physical relationship with Basanna too.

A point of similarity between both plays is the fact that lower class women are more strong and independent compared to those of upper class. For e.g., Sharmishtha and Swarnlatha from Yayati and Ningi, Shari and Bassi from Jokumaraswami have more courage and freedom of expression then Devayani or Gowdathí have.
The Oppression of Women

In *Yayati*, through the trials and tribulations of Chitralekha, Karnad has tried to show the poor plight of Indian woman in a gender-biased society. Through Chitralekha, Karnad has again brought forth the oppression of woman whose desires are always curbed in a patriarchal order, irrespective of the religion, class or social strata she might belong to. Through the character of Chitralekha he presents a situation where a newly-wed bride needs and expectations are ignored even though she is an Aryan princess. In the words of Yadava, Karnad has tried to, “explore the futility of being born a princess who finds reality too much to bear and kills herself” (84).

Chitralekha, a newly wedded bride first suffers at the hands of her husband, Pooru, who to fill up the void in his own life and fulfill his perception of self gives up his youth and vitality to serve his father’s idiosyncrasies. He does not even once think of his bride, who finds it difficult to fill in the ideal of being a royal Aryan woman and a dutiful Indian wife who accepts the decisions of her husband without questioning his authority.

Though initially when Chitralekha hears about this decision of Pooru from her maid Swarnlata she is proud of her husband and says: “Do you know I had greatly wronged the Aryan prince. I thought of him as a coward and cursed my fate for being his wife. But I am indeed very lucky Swarna!” (Karnad, 56). But on being faced with the reality of Pooru’s transformation from a youth full of vigor into a shriveled old man, her idealism wanes and she cries out in terror and panic—“Don’t come near me…go away from here…Don’t touch me!” (*Ibid*, 58).
Yayati instead of understanding what his selfishness has wrought, instead asks Chitralekha to behave in a fashion befitting a royal princess. He forces her to accept the old Pooru and for that sacrifice, the Bharatha family will be obliged to her – “This is no time for recrimination. My heart goes out to you. But you are an educated woman, versed in the arts, trained in warfare. You could have displayed more self-control. Now act in a manner worthy of an Anga princess and Bharat queen. Act so that generations to come may sing your glory and Pooru’s.” (Ibid, 61). When the young maid bluntly refuses, he exercises his power both as father-in-law and King and orders her to obey him.

Chitralekha: No
Yayati: What do you mean?
Chitralekha: I will not let my husband step back into my life unless he returns a young man.
Yayati (calmly): I hope you realize where you are. This is the place of the Bharata’s. I can order you-not as your father-in-law, but as your ruler-to take him in and you will have to obey. But I am not doing that. I request you-I plead with you-not to act in a manner that will bring ignominy on us all.
Chitralekha: Let him come. I will leave the kingdom.
Yayati: Do you remember the vow you took not so long ago-with the gods as your witnesses, in the presence of the holy fire? That you would walk in the path marked by his footprints; whether home or in the wilderness (Ibid, 61-62).

Through these words Karnad has portrayed the pathetic state of Indian woman in ancient days where they were confined within the four walls and allowed no
expression of their feelings. Chitralekha is shown as a woman unwilling to submit to the patriarchal order and expresses her anguish vocally: “Foolish? What else is there for me to do? You have your youth; Prince Pooru has his old age. Where do I fit in?” *(Ibid, 66)*

“Chitralekha in *Yayati*, rebels against the unjust and gender-biased norms and strictures of the Indian patriarchal society. Though she finally ends up committing suicide, she becomes a vehicle to demand the rights of a woman, which are so easily crushed in the patriarchal order” *(Chaitanya, 7)*.

Sharmishtha too comments on the exploitative patriarchal set-up, which crushes and oppresses women without offering any hope of emancipation. Sharmishtha accuses Yayati of Chitralekha’s death—“So here is the foundation of your glorious future: Your Majesty. A woman [Chitralekha] has died; another [Swarnalata] gone mad; and the third [Sharmishtha] in danger of her life. Goodbye Sir” *(Ibid, 68)*.

A substantial portion of the play is devoted to the oppression of women in the patriarchal set-up that expects women to surrender to the will of the male decision makers without raising their voice. Karnad has also highlighted another example of this situation through the story of the maid servant Swarnalata.

Swarnalata was jilted by her husband who thought that she had a relationship with a Brahmin boy before their marriage. Swarnalata who loved her husband very much failed to prove her innocence in spite of her best efforts. And one day when she could not bear her husband misery and suspicion, she decided to give him peace of mind by admitting too his suspicions. But instead of freeing her husband of this dilemma and moving forward, he left her never to return.
The narrative again reiterates the concept of chastity and virginity which holds such a place of prominence in the Indian society. A woman whose virginity has been violated is shunned, but in the same situation, the man is never called to question. Even Sita in Ramayana had to take an ordeal to prove her innocence and Rani in Naga-Mandala was also expected to prove her chastity at the behest of her husband in front of the whole village. Swarnalata’s narrative once again scrutinizes the patriarchal norms of the society that expects a woman to prove her chastity and never taken on her own worth.

In case of Devayani and Sharmishtha, both come from royal family, the former is an “Aryan” princess and the latter an “Asura” princess. But even so Sharmishtha is forced to serve Devayani, and Devayani’s condition is no better; her husband seems more interested in Sharmishtha and finally she leaves her husband out of a feeling of insult. Thus she too, like Shramishtha becomes deprived of the security of family and love.

The women in Yayati seem to be aware of their oppression and repression in the patriarchal order but also know that they cannot do much about it. Whenever they attempt to cross their defined limits, like Chitralekha they meet with disaster. It matters little which class they come from, the women of all social strata seem to suffer more or less equally. Chitralekha and Devayani, the Queen from superior class, and Swarnalata and Sharmishtha from the lower caste, undergo suffering. Stepping out of marital bonds or claiming their rights, whichever the case, the result is always a disaster—the death of the female initiators. The pessimistic message that the playwright seems to convey is that it is difficult to escape the oppression of patriarchal order; a revolutionary attempt more often ends in disaster.
Being a major playwright of postcolonial period of India, Karnad uses his theatrical talent to expose that space a woman occupied in the society and fused the strength and energy so that they can shift their position from margin to centre. *Yayati* presented the socio psychological study of woman: Devayani, Shamishtha and Chitralekha who are treated and defined as "other", "non-man" or "second sex" (Archana, 17)

In conclusion the plight of the women characters in *Yayati* is pitiable. Devayani endures every sort of humiliation and become insane, Swarnlata was deserted after the baseless doubts of her husband regarding infidelity and insults; Sharmishtha is an easy prey of Yayati's sexual gratification. Chitralekha though comes out as a ray of hope and portrays the characteristics of the new woman, she faces the similar exploitation. But she retaliates both as a wife when she does not accept Pooru’s decision of sacrificing his youth and as a daughter in law when Yayati unreasonably demands her submission to the societal norms.

It is pathetic that King Yayati and his son Pooru realize their evil deeds only at the cost of the life of Chitralekha. The playwright portrays the selfless nature and the helpless plight of the Indian women who, by willingly sacrificing their lives, make the members of their family to realize their nobility. Thus Indian women serve as a contrast to Indian men.

Right from the ancient days, till the present, with certain exceptions, the situation has remained the same. Chitralekha is not an individual, but a representative of the early twentieth century Indian woman. Karnad through the voice of Chitralekha projects the message that properly educated women should never be treated as weak, timid, meek and submissive creature. “The chauvinist attitude of Yayati towards
Chitralekha, Devyani and Sharmistha and Puru has surfaced only due to his male hegemonic element which is deeply rooted in him” (Kosta, 117).

In Kambara’s play *Jokumaraswami*, the women are portrayed as individuals in their own right who make decisions, take action and accept the consequences of their action without qualms. Be it a man or woman Kambara does not give them any special treatment, both genders are of equal importance to the storyline and in fact the women are shown as strong supporters to the men. An example would be Ningi who is a lower class servant woman but willfully spurns the attention of Gowda and insults him though he is the most powerful man of the village. On the other hand the timid Gurya is the one who wins Ningi’s hand. With the tacit support of Ningi, Gurya feels strong and is able to face Gowda and keep his own stance. It shows here that women are the strength behind the man, best summed in these words by Gurya to Basanna:

Gurya: You know what happened today, Basanna? Gowda set eyes on Gurupada’s daughter, Ningi, and didn’t he get very, very hot! You know what Ningi did?

Basanna: What did she do, my friend?

Gurya: She spat on him three times and went away.

Basanna: That’s how one should be.

Gurya: I feel very brave when Ningi is close by

Basanna: You want to marry her? (Kambara, 113).

Even Gowdathi who is shown to be cowed down by her husband is bold enough to go to Shari’s house, Shari is the local whore and no respected woman of the village would willingly go to her, but Gowdathi is willing to visit this forbidden place to get the Jokumaraswami from her.
Shivi: Ma’am, everything is ruined

Gowdathi: Why?

Shivi: That prostitute Shari, beat us to it. She’s taken Jokumaraswami from Sutradhara.

Gowdathi: Then why didn’t you go to her place?

Shivi: How can I go to where the Untouchables live?

Gowdathi: For my sake, go. How can I spend another year mumbling God’s name in vain? Go, and I’ll give you loads of gifts.

Shivi: How can a respectably married woman go to a whore’s house, ma’am?

Gowdathi: Right as they say you can’t go to heaven unless you yourself die.

Stay here, I’ll be back (Ibid. 106-107).

As can be seen in these instances, for Kambara, women are strong and resolute, they function as autonomous beings without their every action being controlled by men.

Yet the rules of patriarchal domination remains the same in Indian society and Gowdathi though a strong and independent woman was thwarted and subjugated by her husband. His negligence and domination is reflected in the following excerpts

Gowdathi: What, are you going somewhere?

Gowda: You have the nerve to ask me! Haven’t I told you not to ask where and why? I’m going out.

Gowdathi: Will you atleast come home tonight?

Gowda: She is as worried as if she can’t bear to part from me. Finish telling me whatever you want to say while I smoke a bidi…(Ibid, 100).
Another example of Gowda’s disrespect towards his wife is shown in this excerpt.

Gowda: Will you do one thing?
Gowdathi: Why one? Give me ten things to do
Gowda: Not ten one is enough? Will you do it.
Gowdathi: Tell me what?
Gowda: Will you shut up and go inside? (Ibid, 102).

As can be seen, in both the plays women are shown to be oppressed by the male. Their wishes and concerns are of no importance in the man’s world and they have to bow down to their husband or elder’s wishes irrespective of the right or wrong of it.

**Character Comparisons**

The characters in both the plays are no doubt interesting and realistic. Yayati is a king and symbolizes a person who is interested in sex and lust. For his carnal desires he is ready to sacrifice the happiness of his own son, Pooru. Gowda too is shown as a man grasping for power in the form of land. For the sake of his pride he is ready to go to any length. The women character in both the plays are equally interesting and share distinct similarities with each other. Devayani symbolizes the superego in mind of women who come from upper class community but loses out to Sharmishtha who is representative of lower class community. Just as Gowdathi is from the upper class community but still has to go to Shari for help with her barrenness.
A comparative study of the above mentioned characters will better define their similarity and differences and thereby give additional insights into the style of character definition of each playwright.

**Yayati: The Kingly King and Gowda: The Ruthless Landlord**

Yayati, the king of Kuru dynasty is a mighty, invincible hero of the play. He is addicted to the sensual pleasures of life and wishes to remain young. His lust for youth makes him to marry Devayani whose father Shukracharya knows Sanjeevani Vidya. Through King Yayati’s long span of sensual indulgence described in the play, Karnad has tried to symbolize the futility of chasing happiness in things that have a definite end. Indulgence only begets more indulgence, it sates it. Every climax of happiness ends with a feeling of dejection that it is over in a fraction, followed by a craving to renew, to repeat the pleasure. Therefore, Yayati’s disillusionment becomes complete only when he reaches a point of saturation. He has had his fill yet still remains unfulfilled. “Yayati is a true ambassador of modern common man, who inspite of having much pleasures of life, still feels impatient and dissatisfied” (Kumawat & Ramnani, 74).

Sharmishtha describes Yayati best when she warns him about his foolhardy stance of continuing a relationship with her – “You see yourself as awesome and powerful, a figure towering over your vast possessions, a demi-god if not god himself. You are so busy visualizing the grand design of life, you have no sense of the traps and snares waiting in the grass. You have no sense of how illogical suffering can be and therefore how terrible. You don’t know what a disaster you could be (Karnad, 25).
Yayati is shown as a true connoisseur of all pleasures, he enjoyed happiness from varied sources, but he is always discontented and is always madly running in pursuit of new pleasures and new enjoyments. He mistakes momentary worldly pleasures for eternal happiness and ponders all the time how to get them. He loves life and is in the pursuit for immortality not realizing that every beginning has an end. In his own words he claims that “The only death real to me is that of someone else. Not mine. I never think of my own death, that is not for me a possibility at all. When I ride out into combat, I know I shall return alive” (Ibid, 24).

This shows not only the Kingly personality of Yayati but also his arrogance and lust for life. He also wants to enjoy life pleasures till eternity and this fact was commonly known, as shared by Sharmishtha to Devayani, as to Yayati’s reason for marrying Devayani – “Except that he is not lusting for you. You poor darling, he lusts for immortality. Your father's art of sanjeevani” (Ibid, 11).

The selfishness of Yayati and his pursuance of pleasures over all else is underlined when during the preparations to welcome the newly married couple, Pooru and Chitralekha are being made, Yayati is engaged in making love to Sharmishtha. The amorous instincts prevent him from thinking of his son's happiness. Even when Devayani knows about his illicit relationship with Sharmishtha and challenges him, he shamelessly accepts his attraction and does not understand why Devayani should not accept his amorous pursuits. His lack of understanding and callous attitude is a shock to both Devayani and Sharmishtha.

This is best expressed in the dialogue between Yayati and Devayani where he accepts his attraction to Sharmishtha openly without shame – “I feel bewitched by her. Even now, at this moment I want her. I haven’t felt so entranced by a woman.
What is it? Is it some spell she has cast? Some secret sorcery. I can feel the youth bursting out within me again. Her beauty, her intelligence, her wit, her abandon in love. Not to marry her is to lose her, don’t you see? I must have her. I have to keep her with me. Please try to understand” (Ibid, 30).

Yayati through this dialogue shows his self-centeredness and lack of compassion towards Devayani. This is again defined when Yayati proposes marriage to Sharmishtha and Devayani objects to it, he over rules her by saying – “Why are you being so difficult? Are you afraid of her? Or you being nice to her? (Firmly) My answer to both of you is sorry, my mind is made up” (Ibid, 30). Yayati is shown here as a callous male who overrides both Devayani and Sharmishtha’s wishes in his pursuance of pleasures.

The play *Yayati* is based on the theme of responsibility. Yayati himself is responsible for his downfall. But he hesitates to take the responsibility of the things which have come to him as reactions to his actions. When Sharmishtha informs Yayati that after Devayani’s narration, Shukracharya has placed a curse on Yayati and he will lose his youth and become decrepitude by night fall. Yayati refuses to face the consequences of his action, he loses his self-control and holds Sharmishtha responsible for all these things. “Old age! Decrepitude! By nightfall. And then? Then what? Sharmishtha. You she-devil! You are the cause of all this. You are responsible. You trapped me with your wiles” (Ibid, 42). But on the other hand the same Yayati fears being left alone in his old age as a consequence of the curse and begs Sharmishtha to stay with him. “Have I upset you? You won’t hold it against me, will you? I blurted it out because I hungered for them. But you won’t let me go, will you? You won’t abandon me?” (Ibid, 43).
Yayati typical to egoistical men, trusts no one to help him in removing this curse. “And I wait here helplessly, till he gets that done? A desiccated fool on the one side, who can’t see beyond his silly offspring. And on the other, a youth still wet behind the ears, who despises his father. No, I better go and….” (Ibid, 42). In this one dialogue Yayati show his utter contempt not only for his father-in-law but his wife and son too.

When Sharmishtha tries to console Yayati and requests him to accept the curse and go away from the city with her and live a life in solitude in the forest, he immediately rebels. Yayati has a strong attraction for life and its pleasures. He is also afraid of alienation, he needs the adulation of subjects, his triumphs and conquests and he cannot give it up for anyone and responds in horror - “Solitude? What are you talking about? I don’t want solitude. I can’t bear it. I want people around me. Queens, ministers, armies, enemies, the populace. I love them all. Solitude? The very thought is repulsive. If I have to know myself, Sharmishtha, I have to be young. I must have my youth” (Ibid, 43). Through these lines the playwright has formed a very clear picture of a middle aged man who refuses to accept his decrepitude and the required detachment following it.

In act three of the play, Pooru returns from Shukracharya and informs Yayati that the curse will not have its effect on Yayati if a young man admits to take it upon himself and offers his youth to Yayati in exchange. Yayati is very delighted without knowing who is going to accept the curse. He uses the men and women around him as his pawns and in his kingly isolation believes that anybody would be delighted to take the burden of the curse from him. “Surely there is no shortage of men who will come out to take over their king’s burden. They are my people. They love me. Surely they
will not hesitate to step forward” (Ibid, 46). But Pooru informs him that no one is ready to do so.

Pooru – No one one will accept the curse. Your curse.

Yayati: No one? What do you mean by no one? My dear subjects for whose sake I have face a thousand deaths.

Pooru: They say they have seen you enjoy the glory you thereby earned.

(Pauses)

Actually, some even pointed out that they have paid taxes and tributes for your services (Ibid, 47).

Karnad has portrayed the contours of the real world, i.e. when you laugh the world will laugh with you, but when you are in sorrow you will be alone, deserted even by your kith and kin.

When Yayati realizes that nobody will accept the curse he breaks down and begs his son to help him. When Pooru accepts the curse Yayati believes that it is his due as a father and a king and accepts without a qualm selfishly without thinking about his son or his young bride. But Chitraksha is not a woman who will quietly accept what has come her way, she is endowed with energy which she tries to use for a place in a male- dominated world. A strong sense of patriarchy is instilled in Yayati and is felt when he tries to console Chitraksha by saying that she should accept the ‘old’ Pooru happily to oblige Bharata family. When she refuses, he exercises his authority as her father-in-law and as a king. Yayati strongly believes that the male has voice, presence and power, whereas the female is silent, absent and powerless. Women are expected to repress their desire and bow down to the male will. Thus, when Chitraksha refuses and says she wants to leave the kingdom, it irritates Yayati
because he expected that patriarchy would win and go unchallenged. He scolds her saying: “Do you remember the vow you took not so long ago—with the gods as your witnesses, to the walk in the path marked by his foot prints whether home or into wilderness…..” (Ibid, 62). To this Chitralekha adds ironically: "Or into the funeral pyre?” (Ibid, 62).

Thus, the play depicts Yayati as the champion of patriarchy and his callous attitude to women. He feels that a woman should not violate the norms determined by patriarchy with his masculinity and authority, he treats women as those who are made for fulfilling his carnal whims, but he is unable to rule totally over woman. Karnard does not appreciate the suppressed and subordinated position of a woman and on the contrary, he creates her as a complementary to man.

Yayati in the play is also shown to exploit female community for the cheap sense of 'self', this is best described when Sharmishtha accuses Yayati when Chitralekha commits suicide: “What does it matter who she was. You destroyed her life. I pleaded with you but you were drunk with your future…. So here is the foundation of your glorious future. Your Majesty. A woman dead, another gone mad, and a third in danger of her life” (Ibid, 67-68).

At the end of the play though Karnad has tried to show some redeeming qualities of Yayati especially on the shock of the death of his daughter-in-law, Chitralekha. Yayati is transformed when he sees the dead body of Chitralekha. He says to himself, “I thought there were two options –life and death. No, it is living and dying we have to choose between. And you have shown me that dying can go on for all eternity. Suddenly, I see myself, my animal body frozen in youth, decaying, deliquescing, and turning rancid. You are lying on your pyre, child, burning for life,
while I sink slowly in this quagmire, my body wrinkleless and grasping, but unable to grasp anything.” (Ibid, 68). At last Yayati accepts his old age by embracing Pooru. Pooru once again becomes young but he has lost his beautiful bride on the nuptial night when he was to meet her. “Yayati’s long span of sensual indulgence is a symbol that indicates the futility of chasing happiness in things that have a definite end. Indulgence only increases thirst, it doesn’t quench it” (Trivedi 160).

Through **Yayati** Karnad has tried to represent the modern man who is self-centered “Karnad’s **Yayati** reveals the afflicted consciousness of a broken man like Yayati who tries to find a meaning in existence. Out of sorrow and humiliation Yayati is unable to understand the meaning of life till he is rid of old age. But contrary to his expectation Chitralekha’s suicide leads him to expiate his desire. He projects the image of an existential character and shows that no man has the courage to choose whole-heartedly either right or wrong. He is himself an amalgamation of self-evasion and vanity, self-condemnation and humility. Thus, there is an eternal quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that can sustain us in this chaotic and apparently meaningless world.” (Gupta & Sharma, 36)

In **Jokumaraswami** the Gowda is the ruler of the land. He is a vain and boastful man who belies in enforcing his power through the might of his gun and his henchmen. He is also a neglectful and an indifferent husband. What is really most ironic about the Gowda is that even though he roams the town like a rooster he is impotent and this fact is known by almost all the women except his wife. Though he conceals this fact by visiting all the whores and initiating the virgin whores.

Gowda is called the Dum Dum God because he carries a gun which he pulls out under any pretext. His introduction in the play clearly personifies him.
Mela: There is a Gowda in a certain place.
And the Gowda is a rogue
And he wears a big paunch,
And he struts about carrying a gun.
Lord of town and its boundary,
Gold, silver and gold again
And pretty wench and girl
All, claims the Gowda, are his (Kambara 90)

Gowda wants the whole village to accept him as the God. At every opportunity he tries to show is might and power. He calls himself Lord and others as his slave. His dialogue delivery is also rude and rustic. When he responds to an honest complaint by Gurya whose two goats have been killed and eaten by Gowda’s henchmen, Gowda responds to the complaint rudely,

You let them graze there and the devil killed them. And you have the cheek to blame my servants. You bastard! The devil broke even a man like Basanna’s father, will it leave your sheep alone? To add to this, you spread the scandal throughout the village. If anything dies in the village, it is said that Gowda or his servants are responsible. Bastards, you don’t seem to appreciate the value of a Gowda. Wait a moment and I’ll tell you who killed…. [he takes up the gun.] (Ibid, 94).

This shows the domineering and threatening attitude of Gowda on the villagers who he has cowed down except for Basanna.

Gowda is also a ruthless money lender who exploits the villagers through his power and his henchmen. He acts like a benevolent God who helps the people but does not get due appreciation. This is amply revealed when he heckles Gurya:
It is ten, not five. Bastard! I’ve let you keep on working for me because I pity you. Isn’t there any value for a Gowda who rules the earth? If I so wish, I can make not only you but even Basanna eat dirt, understand! (Ibid, 96).

Another interesting aspect is that though Gowda is impotent he struts around the village soliciting all young women to show his masculinity - “Stop girl. Tell your father this/ Tell him that I haven’t left any land in this village untouched” (Ibid, 98).

But Gowda fears a challenge to his powers in Basanna and asks for reaffirmation whenever given a chance. Both as Gowda and the resultant power he has on the villagers or his masculinity. Towards this end he even challenges Gurya who is feared by the villagers:

“Shut up, you bastard. Come here. Hold your ears (Gurya does as he says.) Sit down, get up, down, up….Press my leg (Gurya starts pressing his leg.) Gurya, to whom do the villagers pay more respect? To me or to Basanna” (Ibid, 99). When Gurya responds: “The men are scared of you, the women are scared of Basanna” (Ibid, 99), he does not like it. When he gets a chance, he challenges this statement with Ningi who happens to call Basanna her brother:

“Crazy girl. How naughty you are. You know that I always get what I want. Why do you give me the run around? I’ve left the house, the field, the earth to wander shamelessly after you. All the girls in the village are crazy about Basanna. What will they get by chasing him? That starving bastard labours in my field. What can he give you? Ask me for whatever your want, ear and eat whatever you want,
take these thousand rupees if you want. Jingle, jingle, jingle…can you hear” (Ibid. 130).

These lines show how Gowda is scared and jealous of Basanna. He does not like the fact that Basanna is more attractive to women, especially when he as Gowda has more money and power and can buy whatever he wants. These lines also show the distorted character of Gowda that though he is impotent he is still running behind Ningi and ready to offer her anything only to prove a point.

Gowda is also shown as an exploitative money lender who has usurped power through illegal means and personifies the corrupt, cruel landlord who exploits and cheats the poor villagers and farmers. Through the lines shared below, Kambara has made Gowda the mouth-piece to show the rampant corruption prevalent in rural India:

“Gowdship is ours for generations. Your father has written off this field to us and has pressed his thumb at the bottom you have come along now to change it all? Let laws and rules be made! In the end, the moneyed man is always the big man. I only have to throw six, if not three, coins and your laws and rules fall into my pocket” (Ibid, 115).

Thus, as seen in both the plays, Yayati and Gowda are similar in their lack of compassion or respect towards their fellow beings, they take for granted that the world was created for their pleasures. They believe that they are the Lords of their universe and everybody has to bow down to their demands. Their attitude towards women is equally callous and lacks sense of respect for the opposite sex. Their attitude towards marital relationship and infidelity is also very flexible and loose.
Pooru: The Sacrificial Lamb and Basanna: The Personified God

Pooru is Yayati’s beloved son who has stayed away from the palace for a long time and now he is back with his bride Chitralekha. Pooru is shown in the play as an angst ridden prince who is on the path towards self-realization and is looking at answers to questions he cannot face. He feels that his life is futile and that he cannot accept the burden of responsibilities placed by his forefathers. When he is given a chance for self-redemption in the form of doing something for his father he accepts with alacrity, but facing the consequences of his action was not as satisfactory. “Idealism is often manipulated for selfish ends as in the case of the Yayati who takes advantage of Puru”s devotion and reverence for him as a son to transfer his curse onto him” (Ghanshyam, 327).

The dissatisfaction of Pooru is shared from his introduction in the play, when he comes back he has certain questions in his mind. When he asks Yayati about his mother and Yayati tells him he also discovers that he is a half-caste and his blood is a mixture of Aryas and Rakshasa family.

She seemed one of the gentlest, most loving creatures one could imagine. Everyone loved her and I married her. She gave me a son and I made her my Senior Queen. And then, suddenly she changed. She started to scream and curse as though she had gone mad, when actually she hadn’t. Very lucidly, she would explain to me her plan –which was to make life intolerable for everyone in the palace….It was in her last few moments that she told me the truth. She was a Rakshasa woman and the Aryas had destroyed her home and hearth. She was bent on vengeance and the inferno she had created was her way of celebrating her success. She had made sure that the
crown prince of the Bharatas had Rakshasa blood in him. The Aryas would be ruled by a ....” (Karnad 39-40).

This shatters Pooru who now feels doubly vindicated – “Say it. A half-caste. A mongrel. And that is me?” (Ibid, 40). This disassociation of self, makes Pooru look for redemption which can help him prove his worth of being a Bharatha prince. In his own words when he first suggests to his father that he will take on his old age – “A worm, aspiring to outdo the eagles.” (Ibid, 49). Here he tries to tell his father that through this act he will become more valiant than even his father and his ancestors.

He shares his feelings of alienation and rootlessness when he tells Sharmishtha, “I want to root myself back in my family. I want to realize the vision that drove my ancestors.” (Ibid, 39). Towards this end he accepts the exchange of the curse with Yayati and he becomes older than his father. However, Pooru does not get redemption instead he is disappointed, as the old age brings neither knowledge nor self-realization. It brings him only the meaninglessness of the punishment meted out to him. That, too, for an act not committed by him.

Our mythology is replete with parental figures demanding sacrifices from their children. The best son is he who accomplishes the task in anticipation of the expectation of his father. The mediocre is one who complies when told by his father. The lowest type is he who obeys but with irreverence. In the play Yayati, Pooru proves to be the best son as he gladly accepts the curse inflicted on his father and willingly exchanges his youth for the old age of his father at the cost of his own happiness and that of his wife Chitralekha.
Here Pooru does not spare a single thought to Chitralekha his new bride towards whom he has a responsibility and sacrificed not only himself but Chitralekha too on the altar of duty and towards his own self-glorification.

In *Jokumaraswami*, Basanna is shown to be the absolute antithesis of Pooru, he is virile and proud and does not bow down to anybody. In this he is more like Yayati and Pooru in his weak self-seeking seems to be more like Gowda. Another point of difference is that Pooru’s rebellion against his father is very covert and not outspoken, while Basanna openly challenges Gowda and he also encourages others to believe that the law of the land has changed and that the new principle of the tiller of the land is the owner of the land has brought an end to the Gowda’s feudal regime. Basanna is a rebel and a rouge who satisfies the women who come to him and seduces Godwati and impregnates her. Pooru on the other hand fears spending the night with his wife, he asks his father’s permission for separate chambers.

But irrespective of this Basanna can be compared to Pooru in the sense that his role and direct linkage with Gowda is similar in theme to Pooru’s linkage with Yayati. Both of them have something which the other wants, in case of Yayati, it is Pooru’s youth and for Gowda it is Basanna’s field. In the climax of the play also both are destroyed, Pooru by Yayati and Basanna by Gowda. But both playwrights give these characters a lease for the future. Pooru in the concluding line is shown to rule long and wisely and Basanna is shown to be the hope for the future in terms not only ample nature’s bounty but also a hope for a better future for the tiller.

**The New Woman: Chitralekha and Ningi**

Chitralekha in *Yayati* and Ningi in *Jokumaraswami* are both almost minor character, but they have an important role to play in taking the story forward.
Chitralekha is a tormented soul who has to bear the burden of her husband’s sacrifice. Hardly does she step into her palace as a bride when her husband barters his youth for his father’s old age, and suicide is the only recourse left to her. Karnad invents the character of Chitralekha as a wife of Pooru who is not there in the original story of Mahabharata. Her role in the play is to question the moral authority of Yayati in taking her husband’s youth for his sensuous pleasure. Her suicide is the turning point of the story and this act makes Yayati face the cruel consequences of his selfishness.

Ningi in Jokumaraswami is a young maiden who is the sister of Basanna and daughter of Gurupadha, who works in Gowda house. She is feisty and challenges Gowda when he tries to misbehave with her. Ningi and Gurya’s dialogue with Gowda, makes Gowda realize the infidelity of Gowdathi and is the turning point of the story, when he collects the villagers and goes to kill Basannna. Both the characters in their respective play form an integral part of the plot progression.

Chitralekha in Yayati, rebels against the unjust and gender-biased norms and strictures of the Indian patriarchal society. Though she finally ends up committing suicide, she becomes a vehicle to demand the rights of a woman, which are so easily crushed in the patriarchal order.

Chitralekha does not give in to Yayati’s persuasion to accept her husband’s old age nonchalantly, and stands unmoved and unconvinced. When Yayati exercises his authority as a king and as a father-in-law and orders her to accept her decrepit husband, Chitralekha vocally rebels against the patriarchal set up and the rituals which treat women not as subjects but as objects with ferocity:

“You are the one who has taken my husband near the funeral pyre; not I. And on the top of it you have come to preach to me! Without
understanding my grief you are giving me lectures! What have you done? You have got an idiot as your son on whose shoulders you have transferred the burden of your sins and then you come to give me lectures on duties of a female as a woman and wife!” (Ibid, 81)

Yayati asks Chitrakela to become a great woman and rise above petty considerations—“Be extraordinary Chitrakela, you should become extraordinary” (Ibid. 83).

Ningi too in Jokumaraswami is resolute and unafraid when she faces Gowda down. She challenges Gowda’s authority over here and mocks him – “You are not a tiger or a bear for me to be scared of. I am not panting with my tongue out just because the village Gowda asked my name….yaah…” She sticks her tongue out at him (Kambara, 97). Ningi is least bothered about Gowda’s threats and knows the impotent man that he is.

A woman in Indian society seems to have only two options -she is either elevated to the level of goddess—the cult of perfect Tulsis and Parvatis of our recent tele-serials, sacrificing all for her children and husband or denigrated as a whore—the immaculate vamps of our films, oozing enormous negative energy. It seems that womanhood could have no other façade. Chitrakela is expected to forgo all her desires, her needs—emotional and sexual, and become a devi of supreme sacrifice. But Chitrakela crosses the limits of all the so-called “morality” and hypocrisy and claims directly for her sexual rights. She says that since Yayati has taken her husband’s youth, he should also take his place in her life. This would ensure that she would bear the child of the Bharata family.
Chitralekha: I did not know Prince Pooru when I married him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He doesn’t possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do.

Yayati (flabbergast): Chitralekha!

Chitralekha: You have taken over your son’s youth. It follows that you should accept everything that comes attached to it.

Yayati: Whore! Are you inviting me to fornication? (Karnad, 65-66)

Thus there are only two choices for women – supreme sacrifice and elevation to sainthood or a demand for her rights which makes her a woman of low character. Though Yayati himself is not ashamed to delve in sensual pleasures with his consorts, he expects a young girl to become an epitome of resistance and penance. Unable to see any escape from the trap closing in around her, Chitralekha is desperate and finding no escape from the patriarchal order, she commits suicide rather than leading a life of oppression.

Ningi in *Jokumaraswami* is also shown as an independent woman. When Gowda sees her for the first time and propositions her. She insults him and show him that she does not care that he is the Gowda of the village – “The sun is shining and I have two eyes. Shall I say it? This is Gowda’s face, these are my slippers” (Kambara 98).

Ningi also is a source of strength for Gurya who in the first half of the play is seen to be cowed down by Gowda but after seeing Ningi’s bravery and bolstered by her support he also defies Gowda openly and laughs at him – “This women is very bad, sir. If you are with her you feel very brave. That’s why I’ll marry her” (*Ibid*, 98).
Here Ningi differs from Chitralekha in the sense that she supports Gurya and is a source of strength for him. Chitralka failed to support Pooru in his hour of need, when he takes the curse on him instead she repudiates him and throws him out.

Ningi also is the only woman who is not touched by Basanna as she is his sister, which we come to know in a conversation between Gowda and Gurya when Gowda asks –“Oh, What does she call Basanna?” and Gurya responds with “She calls him brother” (Ibid, 99). Unlike Yayati who fears touching Chitralekha as he has already been entrapped by two females whose hand he had grasped to save them but ultimately had to pay the price for his noble act.

Through both Chitralekha and Ningi the playwrights have endeavored to paint their characters not as a timid or meek person who accepts masculine authority but as an enlightened woman who has the ability to revolt against the masculine authority. She does not passively submit to the male hegemonic behavior of her elders or superiors who try to mold her according their own will. The playwrights have molded this character as a modern woman who does not remain silent and accept male hegemony, because she knows her own worth and this enables her to fight against the oppression.

Gender relations are constantly changing as society progresses and Chitralekha and Ningi in both the plays reflect this change - that she is not a woman of the past who is puppet in the hands of male authority. She takes her own decisions. For the new women the thought of sacrificing their own interest and welfare is not acceptable and they do not believe in entertaining a feeling of guilt when unable to fulfil the just or unjust demands of their men. Chitralekha in Yayati overcomes this feeling of guilt soon because of self-realization and power of independent thought.
Both Chitralekha and Ningi are the voice of liberated woman who fights for her rights and is ready to break the chain of male sovereignty which still continues in patriarchal society.

**Use of violence in both the plays**

Both Karnad’s *Yayati* and Kambara’s *Jokumaraswami* are based on the theme of responsibility of a person. It is based on the sentiments of the man. Class-distinction and the caste distinction taking the society to violence. In *Yayati*, Sharmishtha, disturbed by the comments of Devayani, pulls her with her long hair, takes her to a well and throws her inside. Sharmishtha’s behaviour is violent whereas Devayani’s words are violent. In order to take revenge on Devayani, Sharmishtha seduces Yayati. Angry by Sharmishtha’s behaviour Devayani goes to her father and makes him to curse Yayati. Pooru’s acceptance of old age is responsible for the death of Chitralekha. The most violent thing in the play is Chitralekha’s death, which leads to Yayati’s change of heart.

In *Jokumaraswami* the beginning of the play itself is violent with the description of the death of the God Jokumaraswami –

Count, and they are five hundred,
Count, and the hands are a thousand
Which grip and chop the tender god.
A thousand hands, in each hand
A sickle or an axe,
Which slash to death the tender god.
Killed and thrown him,
They have slashed and thrown him,
And the flowing blood

Fills the river and the pond (Ibid, 88).

The Gowda is also shown as a violent man with his name itself being “The Musket God” or the Dum Dum God. The strained relationship of Gowda and Basanna is because Basanna suspects Gowda of killing his father to usurp his fields. The description of Gowda’s foul misdeeds is also full of violence – “Yes, in the devil’s field. And as he fired at the sick man, our god didn’t jump, didn’t sing, didn’t say ‘Dum’! He didn’t speak for three days altogether. So, one day, twelve untouchable field labourers were stood in line and our god fired at them saying, ‘Dum.’ Can you tell me what remained?” (Ibid,91).

Also whenever Gowda is challenged either by Basanna, Gurya or Ningi he is seen to have no qualms about pulling out his gun and pointing it at the perpetuator. Like when Gurya complains that two goats were stolen by Gowda’s henchmen, Gowda curses him and shows him his gun. The ending of the play also peaks in violence with all the villagers coming to kill Basanna with sickles and axes as described by Gowdathi when she comes to warn him.

Gowdathi: Oh Basanna! What shall I do!

What shall I do? The

Gowda comes to slay you!

Scoundrels and rascals with sticks

Are raring to get at you

What shall I do?

The Gowda comes to slay you!

There is no refuge
Even in the forest,

There is no one to put some

Sense into these useless bums!

What shall I do?

The Gowda comes to slay you! (Kambara 135).

Here one can feel the play reaching its crescendo with the fear and panic of Gowdathi with the background noise of screams and shouts.

Thus it is seen that in both the play violence is shown rampantly and is used to push the story forward and also forms the final crescendo of the plays, but even so both plays end with a positive note for the future. In *Yayati* with Chitralekha’s violent death changing Yayati and Pooru getting back his life and youth. Similarly Basanna’s death too leads to a final song of regeneration and birth of a new future – “Where the blood falls, Springs the sprout and the shoot, And all the earth is fresh, is green” (Kambara 137).

**Title Representation**

Yayati is a Puranic King of *Mahabharata* and his story of his lust for life and exchanging his youth with his son is legendary. Karnad has taken this mythical story and converted it into a play, he has retained the names of the characters and the basic storyline. Yayati is the main character of the play and the theme of responsibility, lust for eternity and patriarchal dominance are the traits of his personality characteristics given to him, which also become the cause of his destruction. In the play, Yayati is the King, the husband, the lover, the father, the father-in-law and the ultimately the
broken man who was responsible for the destruction of all his relations. Thus the play is rightly named after Yayati.

Whereas in *Jokumaraswami*, though on the surface one feels that this is the story of the Gowda, Gowdathi and Basanna, but when one delves deeper, one realizes that this is actually the story of Jokumaraswami, personified by Basanna. In the prologue itself, Jokumaraswami is introduced, his birth, life and death is described within the prologue. In the balancing act of the play, this same sequence is described for Basanna especially Basanna’s virility which is comparable to Jokumaraswami and his death which was similar to Jokumaraswami. The conclusion of the play suggests regeneration and new life through the death of Basanna, which are the same descriptive lines used in the prologue describing the regeneration of life after the killing of Jokumaraswami. The myth of Jokumaraswami that he has the power to give a child to even a barren woman, and also by consuming Jokumaraswami a woman could get the love her husband is personified by Basanna in the play, when he impregnates Godwathi who is barren. She bears a child by consuming the curry made of Jokumaraswami. Thus the title of the play is justified as the God Jokumaraswami is personified in Basanna, and whose life path follows the same one as Jokumaraswami.

In both the plays the title is named after the main character of the play who has the key role in shaping the plot and the happenings of the play.

**End of the Play**

In both the plays the end is disastrous with the death of Chitralekha in *Yayati* and Basanna in *Jokumaraswami*. Though at one point of time the audience feels disheartened with the death and destruction in the end, yet the Sutradhara ends the
plays with a positive note of rebirth and rejuvenation, which changes the mindset of the viewers that death brings sadness and hopelessness. The positive note in the end restores the feeling of hope and something better is in store for the future.

In *Yayati* the Sutradhara enters in the end with the death of Chitralekha and its resultant impact on Yayati, Pooru, and Sharmishtha –

So perhaps Pooru at last found the courage to ask a question. But was it really a meaningful question or was it a cry of despair that he could hope for no meaning? Well, conventions of Sanskrit drama require that a play have a happy ending. So let us assume that this question led to many more and that finally Pooru found the question he was seeking. For we have it on authority of the epics that Pooru rules long and wisely and was hailed as a philosopher king (Karnad, 70).

It reflects that Pooru with all his complexities and confusion must have survived and faced life rather than escaping it. Whether he received answers to his doubts still remain a puzzle. But when the Sutradhara relies upon the epical history that he ruled long and wisely, it surely suggest a ray of hope and regeneration.

Likewise in Kambara’s *Jokumaraswami*, the Sutradhara reappears in the end after the sheer disaster with the death of Basanna. Two things are very evident with the Sutradhara’s speech, one that he compares Basanna with Jokumaraswami. The Lord of fertility – i.e. hope and bright future. He also hopes for a better future and improvement in the lives of the tiller –

Let a good government rule us,

Let Children play in all homes.

May he who sows own the field.
May the country be filled with wealth and grain.

Come, my little Lord,

Come, my pretty moon,

Come, Jokumaraswami! (Kambara, 137).

Thus the end of *Jokumaraswami* is equally optimistic about the future that it will bring prosperity and success even though Basanna is dead. In this way for both the play death and disaster does not affect the mood of the play and it closes with a hope note for the future with happiness replacing sorrow and order replacing chaos.

**Conclusion**

As can be seen though the plot of both Karnad’s *Yayati* and Kambara’s *Jokumaraswami* is very different, there is ample similarity among the characters and the cause and effect of action, the expectations from each other, the marital discord and indifference all have a similar vein. The use of myth to give substance to the play whether it is *Yayati* the Puranic king or the god Jokumaraswami is also similar. Folk elements of representation like snake gourd, drum rolls etc have been used lavishly to give maximum impact to the play.

Also the aspect of women seeing her role only of bearing a child and perpetuating her husband’s family lineage and ensuring the line of succession for inheritance of his property is similar in both the play be it Chitralekha or Gowdathi. When she is denied that role of ensuring familial lineage and succession, both the dramas then go on to explore if she can play a role in bringing about social change in the case of *Yayati*, freedom from patriarchal dominance and in *Jokumaraswami* by reversing economic relations between the landlord and the tiller, social relations
between the upper caste and lower caste man. Both plays also closely examine the dangers and possibilities involved in such an alliance of a lower caste man or woman with a man or woman of higher socio-economic status, as in the case of Yayati and Sharmishtha or Godwathi and Basanna. Also as in the case of Chitralekha a woman demanding equal rights leads only to punishment and retribution. Thus these situations lead to disaster for the lower caste man (Basanna) or women (Sharmishta) and oblivion for the woman (Chitralekha).

In fact, in both plays though it might seem that the death of Chitralekha and Basanna is a loss of moral force but still in the end their death is a harbinger of change. The question of woman is central to both Yayati and Jokumaraswami and is complexly articulated. One of the important questions that these dramas formulate and seem to explore is: what is a woman’s role in contemporary times, and what forms the basis of a man-woman relationship in contemporary society? In the process of addressing these question, drama during this period seems to be recasting womanhood in particular ways which has been explored in depth here.

Makarand R. Paranjape has aptly said, “Real entertainment doesn’t just refresh you or titillate you, but it recreates you. It makes you anew” (Radhai, 93).
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